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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a model of self-supervision for professional school psychologists which maximizes the amount of supervisory resources available. The history and current status of supervision in school psychology is reviewed. One model of self-supervision for professional school psychologists, the supervisory pool concept, is described and discussed. Major supervisory resources which may be required by the supervisory pool concept are identified and discussed; these include other psychologists, guidance counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, and research and professional organizations. The role of the designated supervisor is explored. Implications for the use of the supervisory pool, together with self-managed professional development to insure that school psychologists enjoy the benefits of effective supervision throughout their professional careers, are explored. (Author/JAC)

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Applying the Supervisory Pool Concept To Supervision in School Psychology

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Abstract

A model of self-supervision for professional school psychologists is presented and discussed. Major supervisory resources are identified and the role of the designated supervisor is explored.

The Supervisory Pool: A Model of Self-Supervision for Professional School Psychologists

Supervision, as defined below, is a necessary element for every profession. Without it, the professional person has only limited opportunities for professional growth or for a realistic evaluation of the person's own competence. Most importantly, without supervision, the professional has few opportunities to benefit from the experiences of others who may have much to contribute in the form of a variety of resources. The purpose of this paper is to explore one model of self-supervision for professional school psychologists which will maximize the amount of supervisory resources which are available to them.

For the purpose of this paper, the definition of supervision used will be "that process which improves and/or maintains the school psychologist's professional competence and functioning within the applied setting." It is important to note that this definition does not limit itself to something which is done to the psychologist by someone else, since the definition is broadly stated as a process of improvement. By contrast to traditional views, supervision may be viewed with the psychologist in the center of the process, and with the initiative being mostly with the "supervisee" rather than with the "supervisor." It is also important to note that supervision is

defined distinctly from administration. Although tasks such as evaluating psychologists for certification purposes or pay increments, assignment of psychologists to various duties, and ordering materials may be the responsibility of someone who has the title of supervisor of psychologists, such functions are administrative rather than supervisory in nature and will not be dealt with in this paper.

Historical Perspectives

The history and current status of supervision in school psychology is neither as detailed nor as rich as is the case with respect to supervision in other professions. In fact, until the recent issue of The School Psychology Review (Ross-Reynolds & Grimes, 1981) devoted entirely to the topic, supervision in school psychology has been almost completely ignored. An excellent description of the history and current status of supervision in school psychology is provided in an article by Murphy (1981), while Rosenfield (1981) provides a conceptual background and suggestions for implementing self-managed professional development programs.

The need for supervision has not gone unnoticed by the major professional organizations. Both APA (1981) and NASP (1978) have recently included guidelines relating to supervision in their respective documents on professional standards. While helpful, both of these documents imply a hierarchial model of supervision and offer little to the experienced professional psychologist.

Supervisory Pool

One model of self-supervision which has some promise for professional school psychologists is the supervisory pool concept (Bixby, Note 1). This model envisions the "supervisee" as being in the center of a pool of resources from which the professional on his or her own initiative may draw the help which is needed to maintain or improve his or her professional competence. The person's "supervisors" may include a designated supervisor, but will surely include professional colleagues and often will include outside resources. The "supervisee" will, in turn on other occasions, become a "supervisor" in another person's pool of resources. This approach is summarized and contrasted with the more traditional models as follows:

> Instead of perceiving supervision as imposed authority. . . it is more appropriate to see it as a pool of help to which we all contribute for the good of the team--each of us offering the expertise we have in return for the opportunity to request assistance wherever and whenever we need it. . . . Supervision . . . is not something a person titled supervisor does, but a pool of services to which all members of the professional team make contributions and from which all can draw as their needs demand. . . . in general, it seems likely that as a minimum, an effective supervisory pool will have in it (1) services that will assist in translating from the language of theory into practical applications, i.e., services that are both scholarly

and helpful, (2) services which will assist all participants to master the art of communications, and (3) services that encourage better performance while accepting that the best one can do today is the only foundation one has on which to build a better tomorrow. (Bixby, Note 1, pp. 3-6).

It is important to note that the supervisory pool model applies to professionals who are assumed to possess the basic competencies of their profession. It is not intended to be used as a model for developing basic competencies such as might be the case in regard to practicum students, apprentices, interns, etc.

The supervisory pool concept as applied to the professional school psychologist has some interesting characteristics. First, the school psychologist's supervisory pool will most likely contain many resource persons, e.g., guidance counselors, physicians, teachers, social workers, who are not psychologists. This means that a good deal of the psychologist's supervisory resources may come not only from outside of the school system, but from outside of the profession as well. Secondly, many elements of the psychologist's pool of resources will be only temporary, changing from case to case or from activity to activity with which the psychologist is involved. The school psychologist is in contact with many new sets of individuals depending on which child is currently receiving attention, or on which particular activity is being performed. Although there is a great deal of overlap in terms of general competencies, each new task undertaken by the school

psychologist may call for new supervisory resources provided by different sets of individuals.

What, then, in addition to the designated supervisor, are the most likely sources of supervisory help for the professional school psychologist? The following are some possibilities.

Resources

Other psychologists. Perhaps the greatest resource a school psychologist has is fellow psychologists. Collectively, several psychologists encompass a vast amount of experience compared to that acquired by only one person. In addition, other psychologists may be able to see a problem from a broader and more detached viewpoint, thus opening up new alternatives. School psychologists who are working alone would do well to establish either semi-formal or informal ties with other colleagues in the same geographical area, and to meet on a regular basis. Relationships should be such that consultation with another psychologist would be available on reasonably short notice if help is urgently needed.

Guidance counselors. Compared to school psychologists, guidance counselors tend to be closer to the instructional staff and can give the psychologist valuable suggestions on the best way to approach individuals on the staff. On a more general level, guidance counselors are often privy to how the psychologist is seen by the instructional staff, information which can provide valuable feedback to the psychologist.

Classroom teachers. Aside from the detailed knowledge which the teacher has regarding any given student, the teacher also has a working knowledge of the school's curriculum, knowledge which is essential to the psychologist in order to make realistic recommendations. In the long run, teachers provide subtle feedback which the sensitive psychologist may consider in terms of evaluating his or her effectiveness.

Principals and educational administrators. In order to be effective, school psychologists must understand what the school expects in the way of psychological services. School administrators are generally in the best position to answer this question. They are also the most effective in helping the psychologist to order priorities for service delivery. Without this, the psychologist must take all of the brunt of criticism for not being in two places at once. The principal can also be quite helpful in evaluating the psychologist's performance from that school's point of view.

Parents. Although it is unusual to think of parents as "supervisors," they are often the best source of information on the effectiveness of the psychologist's intervention. More generally, just as the accumulated experience of several psychologists may be helpful, the school psychologist can learn a good deal about parenting and child development from the cumulative experience of many parents.

Academic psychology and research. A more general resource for the school psychologist is the research and other work carried on in various academic institutions. In fact, one of the functions often associated with the school psychologist is to interpret current research

in psychology and to apply it to educational settings. With few other people to perform this function, it may be necessary for the school psychologist to use academic institutions as primary resources for professional self-improvement.

Professional associations. These are among the most important elements in the school psychologist's supervisory pool. With a relatively small number of professional colleagues available on a day-to-day basis, the school psychologist must look to a larger group for support. Increasingly, professional associations are offering workshops and in-service programs in addition to the typical convention-style format. School psychologists can also benefit from programs offered by community-based or other organizations which are relevant to the psychologist's work.

Designated Supervisor

Although the concept of the supervisory pool focuses on self-supervision, there is a very important role within this model for a designated supervisor of psychologists. The presence of such a person in the supervisory pool can make self-supervision much more effective. Those who are designated as supervisors of psychologists perform the function of involving, leading and coordinating the supervisory activities of the other psychologists, even though the initiative remains with the psychologists themselves. The designated supervisor may wish to hold regular supervisory conferences with an informal and problem-centered approach which would allow staff members to discuss various technical and professional issues, as well as to air personal

concerns (Valett, 1963). A nother approach might involve holding staff meetings which would include presentations by staff members, group case consultations, the sharing of experiences and information which individual staff members may have gained at various conferences, review of new research, discussion of recent books and articles and so on.

The designated supervisor is in a unique position to arrange in-service programs, to provide financial and other help for attending conferences, and to provide books and other resources for professional development. While these activities are somewhat administrative in nature, they have the direct result of increasing the resources in the psychologist's supervisory pool. Another important function which the designated supervisor can fulfill is to help the psychologist to locate and obtain additional resources. A broader view of the possible resources is often more available to the designated supervisor than to the individual psychologist.

Summary

This paper has explored one model, the concept of the supervisory pool, for the self-supervision of post-certification professional school psychologist. Together with the concept of and suggestions for self-managed professional development (Rosenfield, 1981), this represents a beginning effort to ensure that school psychologists enjoy the full benefits of effective supervision not only during their initial professional education program, but throughout their professional career.

Reference Note

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